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LEAGUE OR ENTENTE

BY JOHN JAY CHAPMAN

“A League to Enforce Peace” expresses an idea with which we all sympathise. The whole world is talking of such a league. But while we cast our eyes forward toward the establishment of some formal International Police Force as the ultimate outcome of the war, let us not forget that an informal league,—an Entente or Vigilance Committee,—is most effectually enforcing the peace of the world at the present moment, and is likely to rule it for some years to come. And this for practical reasons:—There is no way of uniting the large nations with the small ones in any formal pact that would work. You cannot give all the members an equal vote, and if you attempt to solve the problem by proportional representation you will get an unwieldy deliberative body which will become a maelstrom of intrigue.

The points to be settled during the next few years will be an infinitude of details, each of which must be settled quickly and according to the loose and handy wisdom of the moment based upon a few abstract ideas and upon as little dogmatic theory as possible. For instance, the Balkan peoples and the various nations of Austro-Hungary may require some years of miscellaneous experiment before they settle down into permanent political groups. During this period they should be interfered with as little as possible, and the Entente Vigilance Committee will be obliged to act as if it were a police force in charge of a Socialist meeting. No formal league of nations could perform this function, which is in its nature executive and paternal. The same may be said as to the thousand and one international disputes which will arise between all the nations in the near future, and as to which a *modus vivendi* must be arrived at in each case as soon as possible.

There is a very great advantage in this method of procedure—namely that the public attention of the entire world will be attracted to events as they arise; and the Entente Vigilance Committee will be obliged to act in the light of a fiercer publicity than could be thrown upon the proceedings of any complex league of nations with its machinery, its committees, its tribunals, etc. The interests of the smaller nations will be better protected by the public opinion of the world at large than it could be by a grant to each of them of any kind of formal self-protection.

The Allies are to-day the trustees of the world. They have the confidence of the radicals of Europe and America, so far as the military part of the war goes. They are somewhat distrusted by the radicals of the world so far as reconstruction goes. No situation could be more advantageous than this to the cause of righteousness. Every act of the Allies in every country of Europe will be scrutinized by the whole world's democracy; and any show of self-interest, partiality or doubtful dealing will be greeted by dangerous clamor from the Socialists and idealists of all countries. The Allies know that the Peace of the World depends upon their retaining the confidence of the world, and that every outcry against their administration is a menace to the peace of the world. They will not be able to act in the dark about anything: for it is formal machinery, it is constitutions, by-laws, officialdom and formation which enables men to act in the dark. If, for instance, the Entente in dealing with Mesopotamia acts in a way that displeases the nonconformist of England, the man in Manchester will get a hearing on the subject. His criticisms will be heeded, because they will be a menace to the world's peace. That man's sense of justice must be conciliated or the whole Entente may be disrupted. The mere suspicion of self interest raised against one of the leading members of the Entente will excite danger everywhere. The smaller nations will be protected by the major power in the moral world.

In other words, the forces that make for altruism are to-day in the strongest position which they ever assume in human government. They are in the hands of a vigilance committee which has a popular mandate behind it.

To compare great things with small:—the Reformers have just won an election. They have noble aims. They have based their appeal on the best motives of man. They have

not sullied their own record in any way. They hold the attention and have the confidence of the people. Let them not try to form a political party, or to eternize their work by formal machinery of any kind; for if they do, they will dissipate their own virtue. Let them not try to bottle their commodity: for it cannot be bottled.

I do not contend that there should never be any political parties, or that in the future a League of Nations may not come into existence. I only suggest that the vision of a united world which we have all had during the last four years of war cannot be grafted upon any League of Nations now or soon to be set up; and that the premature attempt to set up such a league will be accompanied by a terrible disillusion. The Entente as it exists, sanctified as it is by the glory of a righteous and successful war, and freighted with the hopes of humanity, is a more likely vehicle for the partial fulfilment of that issue than any league which the wit of man can devise at the present time. That the heroic virtue which now controls the Entente will last forever or lead to a millennium is not to be expected. The best that we can hope is that the subsidence of this selfless virtue may be gradual, and that some of its good influences may pass into the newer institutions of mankind.

JOHN JAY CHAPMAN.